Much of the rhythm over the years has been to the periodic beat of floods, demands for flood control, and actions to stem future floods. Any examination of the Tulsa District's accomplishments rightly begins with flood control.

Sixty-five of the District's reservoirs and other projects have included flood control storage or protection measures. Those projects range from big reservoirs and channels to the Arkansas River levees at Tulsa. In some instances, the floodplain or flowage easements were purchased to reduce or eliminate flood damages. Lake projects provide 16 million acre-feet of flood control storage.

With its location in tornado alley, in an area subject to freak rainstorms, the Tulsa District sustains some of the most frequent and disastrous flooding in the United States. But the good news is that Corps projects have prevented more than $2 billion in potential flood damages in the Tulsa District over the past five decades.

WATER SUPPLY. "We wanted to be in a free state, but I reckon there ain't no freedom here except to die of thirst," wrote an anti-slavery farmer who moved to Kansas before the Civil War.[3]

In a dust-parched region, the lure of water has often been overwhelming. Natural water supplies vary from abundant to critically sparse across the Tulsa District. Therefore, one of the most important functions of Corps projects is to provide or augment supplies of fresh water for urban and farm dwellers throughout the region.

Water from Corps' reservoirs can be used for irrigation, as authorized by Congress in 1944, and for municipal and industrial water supplies if the users repay the costs. Tulsa District projects contain two million acre-feet of water supply storage.

HYDROPOWER. The Tulsa District region moved from candles to computers in a single generation with the help of the Corps of Engineers' hydropower program.

The hydropower principle powered the old water wheels that ground the flour that fed pioneers. Now, by again tapping energy from falling water, hydropower provides clean, renewable energy that is often more economical than alternate sources.

Federal responsibilities in power production have evolved from the days when Oklahoma Gov. Red Phillips tried to evict federal construction workers from the Denison Dam powerhouse site. Today eight Tulsa District projects produce power — Eufaula, Fort Gibson, Keystone, Kerr, Tenkiller, Webbers Falls, Broken Bow, and Texoma. The GRDA produces power at Pensacola Dam and Lake Hudson. The power produced is marketed through another federal agency, the Southwestern Power Administration, and regulated by still others.

More than 46 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity have been "sold" from District projects since the first power was produced at Denison Dam in 1944 — enough electricity to light three million homes for an entire year. That's about $3.3 billion worth of power.

Federal policy has changed in the past decade to encourage more private involvement in hydropower projects. Today, the Corps plans, constructs, and operates hydropower projects only when it is impractical for non-federal interests to do so. In most instances, hydropower facilities at Corps projects are now developed by non-federal interests, and the Tulsa District's role is largely one of coordination and license review. For example, the Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority has added hydropower at Kaw Lake. The Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma has been approved to design, construct, and finance generating facilities at W.D. Mayo Lock and Dam on the Arkansas River waterway. Non-federal interests are also working toward constructing hydropower facilities at six other Tulsa District projects.[4]

RECREATION. From the Great Salt Plains boat races in the 1950s to Tulsa's Labor Day Great Raft Races on the Arkansas River in the 1980s, people have been drawn to the water's edge. In recognition of this need, Congress in 1944 authorized the Corps to build, maintain, and operate public park and recreation facilities at its projects, whose waters and lands are to be open for public use and enjoyment.